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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Emergency economic assistance to the Comoros

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 51/30 F of 13 December 1996, the General Assembly requested all Member States and donor bodies, as well as the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations, to grant to the Comoros all necessary humanitarian, financial, economic and technical assistance, in order to enable it to achieve national reconstruction and sustainable development. The Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to dispatch to Moroni a multidisciplinary humanitarian and technical assessment mission in order to carry out a detailed study of the needs of the country in terms of assistance and to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. This report is presented to the General Assembly in response to that resolution.

II. General background

2. The three islands which make up the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros (Grande Comores, Anjouan, Mohéli)[1] and their 509,000 inhabitants are going through a period of economic and political change; this had triggered a social crisis without precedent in the country's history. The Comoros gained its independence in 1975 and economic conditions have been deteriorating since 1985; the situation worsened in 1997 due to the crisis created by the separatist aspirations of Anjouan and to severe shortages of electricity and water which affected all the main branches of the economy. Growth slowed in 1997 and real gross domestic product (GDP) declined by 1 per cent resulting in a 2 per cent drop in per capita income.

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3. Per capita income has been falling steadily in real terms: in 1997, it was close to 17 per cent lower than the 1985 level. With a per capita GDP of close to US$ 450, a life expectancy at birth of 57 years, an adult literacy rate of 56 per cent and rising poverty, the Comoros is one of the poorest countries in the world; in 1997, it ranked 140th out of 175 countries in terms of the human development index published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

4. There are a number of obstacles which hinder the development of the Comoros: it is divided up into several islands; it has a very young and rapidly growing population and is therefore densely populated; its natural resources are limited; it has a shortage of skilled manpower in the context of widespread unemployment; it is heavily dependent on external aid, it has a fragile ecosystem and is vulnerable to natural disasters. In addition, there is political instability reflected in repeated coups attempts which have impeded social and economic development since independence.

5. These difficulties are exacerbated by structural problems. Efforts to give a boost to the private sector have not produced the hoped-for results. The economy is not competitive and it is hampered by a lack of skilled human resources and high production costs, due primarily to the inflationary budget deficits. Deficiencies in the conduct of State affairs and in the management of public resources are having repercussions on private enterprise and productivity.

6. The serious crisis that has affected public finances in recent years is due in large measure to the underdeveloped productive activities and the falling prices of raw materials which account for the bulk of the country's foreign exchange earnings. The indecisive manner in which the economy has been managed and deficiencies in the conduct of public affairs have resulted in the squandering of public funds and have made the national economy non-competitive on foreign markets. As a result the State has been unable to pay civil servants' salaries and to honour its external debt service payments.

7. The current socio-economic situation of the Comoros is disturbing, and can be summed up as follows: rapid population growth coupled with rising unemployment; steadily declining per capita income; a shrinking export sector; an increasingly costly and decreasingly competitive economy; deteriorating economic and social infrastructure and limited investment flows.

III. Political and economic context

Political situation

8. On the political level, the election, in March 1996, of Mr. Mohamed Taki Abdoulkarim to the office of President of the Republic put an end to the events which had been adversely affecting Comorian political life. A new constitution was adopted by referendum in June 1996 and a new legislative assembly was elected the following December. According to the new constitution, the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros is a federal State based on the principle of Islam. The President of the Republic, the Head of State, is elected by universal suffrage for a six-year term. The members of the Government are appointed by the President of the Republic on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, the Head of Government. The State is organized into governorates, one for each island. Each governorate has broad administrative autonomy and is headed by a Governor who is appointed by the President of the Republic on the recommendation of the council of each island. Legislative

power is held by a single-chamber parliament, the federal assembly, whose 43 members are elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term.

9. The territorial integrity of the Comoros has been threatened, since March 1997, by the crisis currently affecting the island of Anjouan and, to a lesser extent, the island of Mohéli. The crisis is primarily economic in nature and is due to the drop in real income, the declining level of well-being – which was already modest – and the steady rise in unemployment and poverty.

10. In order to deal with the current separatist trends and to safeguard the country's territorial integrity, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), acting in cooperation with the League of Arab States, has been mediating in an effort to help all Comorian parties reach a lasting solution leading to the restoration of peace, security and stability.

11. The Secretary-General, while reaffirming his support for the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros, has called on the parties to seek a peaceful, negotiated solution to the situation. He has also designated his Special Representative for the Great Lakes region as observer to the meetings between the parties being held under the auspices of OAU.

Economic and social situation

12. During the first 10 years following the Comoros' accession to independence in 1975, the economy grew – stimulated by public investment in social and economic infrastructure – at the rate of 6 per cent annually; once the large-scale projects were completed, towards the middle of the 1980s, the pace of growth slowed and between 1986 and 1996 the GDP increased on average by only 1.2 per cent; as a result per capita income dropped by about 2 per cent annually.

13. The Comorian economy is, above all a rural economy. The industrial sector is limited to small-scale manufacturing activities, and tourism is not, as yet, very much developed. Agriculture (including fisheries), trade and public administration make up the bulk of economic activity and account for some 85 per cent of GDP, as compared with miscellaneous services and construction which account for 11 per cent and the manufacturing industry, which accounts for only 4 per cent. Trade in goods and services (imports plus exports) accounts for more than half of GDP. The Comoros is, moreover, a consumer economy; during the period 1985–1996 consumption on average exceeded production by at least 2 per cent of GDP; the difference was financed by foreign savings – primarily in the form of public and private transfers – which also covered total gross domestic investment.

14. The agricultural sector taken as a whole – including fisheries, livestock breeding and forestry – represents nearly 40 per cent of GDP and provides employment for 70 per cent of the working population. Within the sector, production of food, which is increasingly consumed on the spot, accounts for more than half of the value added, whereas fisheries, livestock breeding and forestry account for an additional 35 to 40 per cent and exports for 10 to 15 per cent. Although they account for a small share of GDP, exports of agricultural produce make up 95 per cent of Comorian exports. Food imports alone – primarily rice, a staple which provides half the calories consumed by the population – outweigh export earnings from cash crops.

15. The population has grown poorer due to the overall deterioration of the economy and the growing population. Low purchasing power, compounded by the 33 per cent devaluation of the Comorian franc in 1994 in relation to the French franc and the exorbitant prices – relatively speaking – of foodstuffs, appears to be the cause of food insecurity primarily

among the poorest strata. Poverty varies from one island to the next and is especially prevalent in Anjouan due to the population density and the drop in the prices of the main export products, primarily cloves. An annual per capita income of US$ 440 is the generally accepted definition of the threshold of absolute poverty; the 1995 household survey showed that 46 per cent of households – that is to say about half the population of Comoros – now lives below the poverty line.

16. The economy has been slowing down since 1985, revealing weaknesses in the management of the public sector and resulting in an untenable financial situation; this has contributed to an erosion of confidence both within the country and among foreign donors. Finding itself unable to borrow abroad on market terms and given the limitations of resorting to domestic credit, the Comoros has financed its growing deficits primarily by falling behind in its payments, both internal and external.

17. Starting in 1990, the Government embarked, with the assistance of the international community, on a vast stabilization and structural adjustment programme in order to reorganize public finances, liberalize the economy and strengthen institutional capacities. However, this programme has had only limited success due, primarily, to the continued uncertainty of the political climate which has made it difficult to achieve the targets set in the structural adjustment programme.

Recent economic development

18. The Comorian economy showed very modest real growth in 1996, growing by around 1 per cent as compared with 2.3 per cent in 1995, a drop of some 5 per cent over a two-year period, whereas the population continued to grow at roughly 2.7 per cent per year. The economy remains very fragile because of the lack of diversification, the lack of competitiveness, the very high factor costs and the very small domestic market. The downturn in national production is reflected in most sectors of the economy. The 12-month rate of inflation in 1996 was kept under 3.5 per cent because of the prudent monetary policy followed by the central bank and because the Comoros is part of the franc zone. In the meantime the external position weakened appreciably; gross official reserves amount to the equivalent of 7 months of imports of goods and services (excluding factor incomes) and external arrears are estimated at US$ 43 million, which is equivalent to 19.1 per cent of GDP.

19. Public finances are characterized by a large structural deficit. The State's tax receipts remained low in 1996, at 12.8 per cent of GDP and came essentially from indirect taxes on foreign trade. This is due to the overall weakness of the economy. Current expenditures (budgetary and extrabudgetary) came to about 20.7 per cent of GDP in 1996. Capital expenditure remains low due to the lack of counterpart funds from project disbursements – a response by some donors to the accumulated arrears of external debt-service payments. Suspension of the payment of grants for the budget, pending implementation of a proper structural adjustment programme, has inevitably resulted in a further accumulation of domestic and external arrears. It is estimated that the domestic and external arrears amount to 9.6 per cent and 19.1 per cent respectively, of GDP.

20. As for the external situation the terms of trade have deteriorated and there is a structural balance-of-payments deficit. Exports cover only 13 per cent of imports. The Markets for the Comoros' traditional exports have been weak and this development was marked, in 1996, by a further drop in earnings from commodity exports and by a decrease in the value of imports. In addition, external balance-of-payments assistance was suspended

and debt-service payments rose. Monetary assets amount to 7 months of imports of goods and services, excluding factor income, and the external debt is currently estimated at 86.6 per cent of GDP while debt-service payments correspond to 42.7 per cent of exports of goods and non-factor services.

21. The social sectors have been particularly hard hit by the deteriorating economic situation. The State budget has allocated very little money for education and training and this has resulted in unprecedented shortages of material and equipment in the schools and in significant deficiencies regarding initial and ongoing teacher training. The same is true of the health sector for it has not received the necessary funding. The qualitative shortcomings of the social and health infrastructures are compounded by a shortage of trained personnel, a general state of decay and shortage of equipment in the health centres and hospitals and the difficulty of obtaining essential drugs.

22. Faced with the deteriorating financial situation in 1996 and the growing arrears in salaries resulting therefrom, the Comorian authorities concluded what was called a monitoring programme from February 1997 to July 1997 with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the purpose of which was to correct the accumulated delays in the introduction of economic reforms and to restore confidence with a view to creating conditions conducive to a recovery of the economic situation so as to resume the dialogue with the international financial institutions.

23. The information available for 1997 suggests that GDP growth will be under 1 per cent. The economic recession has worsened due to the complete collapse of the energy sector which has led, on the one hand, to severe electricity shortages and, on the other hand, to the Anjouan separatist crisis; this has delayed the normal execution of the programme throughout the national territory.

IV. Main development problems

24. *Population density*. In 1996, the Comorian population was estimated to be 509,000 inhabitants over an area of 1,860 km^2, which gives a population density of 274 inhabitants per km^2, one of the highest in Africa. The population is further characterized by its youth: 45 per cent is under the age of 15 and 57 per cent is under the age of 20. This young population is a heavy burden for the State, which has to provide for its education. The consequences in terms of the investment to be made are considerable, not to mention the repercussions at the level of the demand for food.

25. *Poor health conditions*. The infant mortality rate is very high (103/100,000) as is the maternal mortality rate, which is estimated at 500 per 100,000 live births. Malaria is endemic and affects a significant proportion of the population. Malnutrition is common and the calorie ration is only about 1,754 calories per day, with variations between the islands. This poor health situation is reflected in a life expectancy at birth of less than 57 years.

26. *Low rate of activity and high unemployment rate*. The vast majority of the population lives in rural areas, at a subsistence level. The gross employment rate of the population is relatively low, about 28 per cent, corresponding to an unemployment rate of 72 per cent according to the most recent population census in 1991. The labour market is characterized by a labour supply which is continuing to grow rapidly with an influx of young people of working age estimated at 12,000 persons per year. The active population is estimated at 3.4 per cent of the total population, of which over one third is without stable employment. The formal demand for labour is decreasing, which is reflected in an unemployment rate estimated at 30 per cent of the active population.

27. *Environmental and urban problems*. The sustainable development of the Comoros is gravely threatened by a rapid deterioration of the natural environment. The land environment is subjected to massive deforestation because of demographic pressure on the arable lands and the need for energy resources. The coastal environment is threatened by the removal of sand and coral for construction. As to the urban environment, it is affected by the adverse consequences of demographic growth and the growing impoverishment of the population.

28. *Vulnerability to external shocks and remoteness from the rest of the world*. Like all small countries, and tropical islands in particular, the Comoros depends for its exports on a small number of agricultural products and must, on the other hand, import almost all the consumer goods, petroleum products and raw materials which it needs. Its imports are therefore particularly sensitive to external shocks and the resulting deterioration in the terms of trade. The Comoros is far away from the main world markets, which gives rise to particularly high transport costs and consequently reduces its development potential.

V. Structural reforms

29. The Comoros has instituted a number of structural reforms in order to embark on a course of sustainable development. Four major types of action have been undertaken: macro-economic reforms, reforms of the administration, privatization of public enterprises and liberalization of the economy.

30. *Internal adjustment and financial reforms of the public sector*. The immediate cause of the economic and financial difficulties of the Comoros is the adverse effects of budgetary management on internal and external balances. The goal is to remedy the situation by bringing down the consolidated public deficit to a manageable amount, without an accumulation of arrears. A structural revision of the tax system is under way, the goal being to simplify and reduce the number of the rates, identify taxpayers and streamline administrative procedures. The strategy adopted to contain public expenditure is to reduce the wage bill by reducing the staff of the civil service and eliminating duplication.

31. *Reforms of public enterprises*. A reform of public enterprises involving the privatization of management through concession is under way with a view to increasing the efficiency of these enterprises, establishing favourable conditions for the development of the private sector and creating employment. So far, the national water and electricity company has been privatized, and preliminary financial studies on the privatization of the oil company are being conducted.

32. *Civil service reforms*. While reducing staff, the public authorities are seeking to make the administration more effective. The strategy is to evaluate and redefine the functions and objectives of public bodies while helping them to strengthen their means of action.

33. *Measures to benefit the private sector*. The action taken by the public authorities aims to make the private sector the engine of growth for investment, production and employment. Among the actions which are being undertaken are the abolition of administrative measures for the control of foreign trade and prices; the adaptation of the tax structure so as to promote private investment; and the preparation of a legal study and a plan of action to guarantee the execution of contracts, and the free opening and closure of enterprises.

34. *Reduction of population growth*. One of the major problems which the Comoros has to face is the rapid growth of its population, which increases the demand for social services

and jobs and puts increasing pressure on a fragile ecosystem. Measures are being taken so that all Comorians, whatever their income level, have access to family planning services.

35. *Human resources development.* The national policy is designed to improve the quality of primary education and basic health services. A master plan for education is being drawn up, which accords priority to improving school attendance rates and adult literacy rates and enhancing the quality of teaching through an increase in its internal and external effectiveness. The Comorian Government has undertaken a policy to promote the health of its population through adherence to various strategies, such as the 1978 Declaration of Alma Alta on primary health care as a basic strategy for the development of the health sector, and the Bamako initiative.

36. *Preservation of the environment and proper management of natural resources.* The Government recognizes the principle of integrating the environmental dimension in the formulation and implementation of development programmes. In coordination with the formulation of the national policy on the environment, the Government has adopted an agricultural development strategy aimed mainly at ensuring food security and the nutritional balance of the population, promoting export crops, encouraging the creation of productive employment in the agricultural and para-agricultural sector and ensuring sustainable land use.

VI. External aid

37. The Comorian economy is heavily dependent on external aid. Thus, the annual net value per inhabitant of official development assistance averaged 90 dollars for the period 1992–1996, or the equivalent of 25 per cent of GDP. External aid, proportionately, remains high in comparison with the economic weight of the country and its population. It came to about 47 million dollars per year, all assistance combined, over the past five years.

38. From 1993 to 1996, the international community contributed some US$ 179.5 million in official development assistance. The amount declined from US$ 48.8 million in 1993 to US$ 41 million in 1996, a decline of 16 per cent over four years. In 1996, external aid reached its lowest level in the past six years; 77 per cent of external aid is in the form of grants and 23 per cent in the form of concessional loans. The priority socio-economic sectors receiving aid are education, public health, integrated rural development, transport and agriculture.

VII. Initiatives in aid coordination

39. The Government has chosen the round table mechanism, with the support of UNDP, to strengthen the dialogue on policies and strategies with its development partners and promote the mobilization of external resources. Thus, sectoral consultations on agriculture and the environment were held in Geneva in 1995, and consultations on education are planned for the end of 1998. The Government plans to convene a global round table conference focused on combating poverty.

VIII. Main initiatives of the United Nations system

40. The main agencies of the United Nations system which are active in the Comoros are UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) are involved as executing agencies for programmes financed by UNDP or by UNFPA.

41. With regard to the United Nations system, the UNDP resident representative, in his capacity as resident coordinator, presides over coordination meetings between the agencies for the purpose of study, coordination and the adoption of collective decisions on policy, programming and management aspects. In order to strengthen the role of the resident coordinator and coordination among the agencies, an agreement was reached in 1995 to establish an ad hoc advisory field-level committee, including all United Nations agency heads, on the basis of the coordination mechanism envisaged in General Assembly resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992.

42. The various United Nations agencies in the Comoros are working closely to meet the objectives and priorities defined in the country strategy note, drawn up jointly by the Government and the United Nations system, which lays down the guidelines and overall strategy of the system in support of the development efforts of the Comoros. The United Nations system has instituted a harmonization of the programming cycles for the period 1997–2001 in order to further improve programme design and implementation.

43. In recent years, the coordination of activities between United Nations agencies has been strengthened. The members of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy, consisting of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO, have worked in close collaboration with the World Bank, other United Nations agencies and donors. A consultation mechanism has been established in the area of health through a sectoral committee bringing together the Government and the donors involved in the health sector, as in the case of action to combat the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) undertaken in the context of the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS). The consultation mechanism worked well during the preparation of cooperation programmes of United Nations agencies present in the Comoros. Collaboration between the agencies is also effective in the fields of population, education/training, health, emergency assistance and institution-building.

44. *UNDP*. The main objective of UNDP cooperation, in the context of its new country programme, is to support the efforts of the Comoros for sustainable human development and poverty reduction. The new country programme, or country cooperation framework, will cover the period 1997–2001, in accordance with the country strategy note.

45. UNDP support is aimed at sustainable capacity-building, to the exclusion of palliative and short-term measures, through advisory and training activities. To this end, UNDP activities are integrated in the local environment and mobilize each of the parties around this common objective. The approach utilized is very participatory and involves all the actors concerned: institutions, associations and local communities.

46. UNDP action emphasizes the programme approach, namely activities within the framework of well-defined national policies and programmes. This action consists of helping national authorities to develop medium-term policies and development strategies for sustainable human development and, in particular, the formulation of a national poverty

reduction strategy. UNDP initiated the reflection on a long-term vision for the Comoros, with the support of the Africa's futures project.

47. Action is being carried out at the level of civil society and decision-makers to develop a national dialogue on poverty, empower grass-roots communities and their associations to manage the development process, and forge alliances between the different segments of society, the national authorities and the donor community around the common objective, sustainable human development.

48. In the context of support for the formulation of development policies, UNDP has played a crucial role in action which led to the adoption of the national policy on the environment and the environmental plan of action, the objective of which is to preserve the biodiversity of the Comoros. Similarly, UNDP action has been predominant in organizing general meetings of the private sector which led to the establishment of the Association for the Promotion of the Private Sector aimed at facilitating the creation of enterprises and guiding and advising new entrepreneurs. Among the results of UNDP action to benefit the private sector are the establishment of a single office for entrepreneurs, liberalization of the chamber of commerce, industry and agriculture, and the establishment of professional organizations.

49. In the context of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa, which has as its priority area the promotion of information technology for development, UNDP organized an exploratory mission in March 1998 to prepare for the forthcoming arrival of a mission to formulate the framework for assistance to the Comoros of the project "Internet initiative for Africa – sustainable development".

50. The report on sustainable human development in the Comoros issued in 1997 is regarded as a technical document which should make it possible to lay the foundations of a national poverty reduction strategy. In respect of the development of human resources, UNDP financed the preparation and dissemination of a master plan for education and intends to complete the process, basing its submission on sectoral consultations in the framework of the round-table process, as soon as the political situation allows.

51. UNDP is continuing its action in the area of aid coordination and resource mobilization to meet national development priorities. UNDP support is being provided, in particular, through the round-table mechanism and through the activities of the United Nations resident coordinator system. This support also aims to strengthen the capacities of national institutions responsible for aid coordination; UNDP assistance has made it possible to update economic statistics and aggregates of the nation's economic accounts and modernize the data bank of the public investment programme. The resource mobilization strategy established for the period 1995–1996 has led to a financing of programme activities at a level of 47 per cent of approved funds.

52. UNDP, along with national authorities, local communities and the international community, is supporting the implementation of development programmes in priority areas of sustainable human development. These capacity-building activities will be formulated and carried out with the close participation of local communities and associations concerned, which must be regarded as full-fledged partners bearing new responsibilities in the implementation of the development process.

53. The UNDP programme of activities for the period 1997–2001 is developed around four complementary areas that correspond fully to national development priorities, as identified in the country strategy note prepared by the Government with UNDP support, namely: (a) strengthening of governance; (b) improvement of the quality and accessibility of health services; (c) strengthening of production capacities and development of sustainable

livelihoods for the most disadvantaged; and (d) environmental conservation. The activities carried out within the framework of the first area of the programme are part of continued UNDP support for administrative reform in the organization of presidential and legislative elections.

54. UNFPA: The first UNFPA programme of assistance (1989–1993) focused on maternal and child health and family planning. The assistance provided by UNFPA enabled the Government to define the framework for a national population policy and to improve its data base in that field.

55. The UNFPA programme of assistance for the 1997–2001 period will focus on reproductive health and family planning. The current programme should result in the strengthening of the technical and institutional capacities of the Ministry of Health by facilitating the population's access to quality services and laying the groundwork for the national reproductive health programme. UNFPA is the largest donor for population activities in the Comoros: it plays a dominant role in the area of family planning and in the design of a national programme for the integration of women into the development process.

56. UNICEF: The UNICEF programme focuses on the health/nutrition, education, water and sanitation sectors. The strategy it has chosen is based on strengthening community participation in a spirit of greater sharing of responsibilities among the Government, the community and UNICEF with a view to improving services.

57. In the area of health, assistance revolves around three projects: primary health care/ Bamako initiatives, expanded immunization plan and health promotion. The programme seeks to guarantee 60 per cent of the population access to essential quality care, both preventive and curative, including basic health care (emphasis is laid on malaria and diarrhoeal disease control and access to essential drugs); consolidation of the Expanded Programme on Immunization and the promotion of appropriate low-cost technologies with a view to improving the water supply, hygiene and the environment. Moreover, the programme is supplemented by the activities of UNDP, the World Bank and WHO in the areas of infrastructure and training.

58. The education programme is aimed at increasing the net school enrolment rate and improving learning results with a view to increasing the number of pupils who complete the primary cycle. More importantly, it is hoped that increased teacher training and parent participation in school management and the establishment of a greater number of school boards, composed of teachers, parents and community leaders, will result in better prioritization and identification of activities and increased acceptance of responsibility by each participant (Government, community and other outside partners). The aim is to reach a total of 52 schools, or 20 per cent; to do so additional funds will be needed.

59. The programme for social planning, advocacy and social mobilization is aimed at strengthening national planning capacities and strengthening the system for the collection and analysis of social statistics designed to improve the follow-up of trends and introduce appropriate remedial action. It will help to follow up the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to carry out advocacy activities aimed at decision-makers, society, families and children. This may become a vital tool in identifying trends and making necessary programme adjustments. The UNFPA programmes established as a complement to those of UNICEF are the driving forces behind it.

60. World Health Organization: Technical cooperation between the Comoros and WHO is aimed at helping the country to achieve priority health development goals under its plan entitled "Perspectives to the year 2010". Elaborated by the Government with the assistance of WHO, UNICEF and UNDP, the plan's main objectives are to curb population growth,

to improve the effectiveness of the public health system and to ensure effective community participation in the management of health services.

61. Over the past two years, WHO has supported government initiatives to strengthen the health system in the areas of management, financing of services, decentralization and integration of programmes, community participation, the functioning of health districts, personnel training and disease control, particularly, malaria control and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STD), and preparedness for and responses to endemic emergencies.

62. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: By early 1997, FAO, which has long been involved in the rural development of the Comoros, was executing only one project, aimed at strengthening veterinary services and supporting the development of livestock-raising. Nonetheless, the exploratory mission of June 1997 for the purpose of laying the groundwork for a Special Food Security Programme for the Comoros and the recent visit of the Director-General of FAO seem to indicate that it will become more active in the coming months.

63. World Food Programme: The World Food Programme, which has been involved in the Comoros since 1979, ceased its activities there in December 1996. During that period, WFP lent its support mainly to rural development, food security, the health system and school cafeterias by providing supplies to hospitals, health centres and primary schools. Nonetheless, further to recommendations by the inter-agency mission conducted from 28 August to 6 September 1997, dispatched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in response to General Assembly resolution 51/30 F, WFP is finalizing a special food assistance programme. In this context, WFP will distribute food supplies, particularly rice, to the most vulnerable population groups whose need for food assistance has been clearly established.

IX. Multidisciplinary United Nations Mission

64. The United Nations sent a multidisciplinary mission to the Comoros on 25 August 1997, aimed at evaluating the country's emergency humanitarian and economic assistance needs and preparing a plan of action for submission to the international community, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/30 F. Participants in this two-week mission included representatives of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Political Affairs, UNDP, UNICEF, FAO and WFP.

65. The mission found that the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros needs immediate assistance in the areas of food, agriculture, livestock-raising, fisheries, health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation without overlooking education in respect of population issues. A rapid response is necessary in order to meet immediate and essential needs which the vast majority of the target population (about 40 per cent) cannot satisfy owing to the deterioration of social and economic conditions. Estimates of these needs are given in the table contained in the annex.

66. The emergency assistance programme recommended for a six-month period is not the traditional type of humanitarian assistance which is provided in the context of armed struggle or in the wake of natural disaster, but it is nonetheless of the highest priority and urgency in view of the socio-economic crisis currently rocking the country; the many incidents that have resulted in violent clashes and deaths can be taken as a warning that the situation is gradually deteriorating and could become really serious unless steps are taken to help the population groups currently in economic distress.

67. An ambitious development programme will have to be elaborated and implemented with the support of the international community, in order to take over once the recommended emergency activities come to an end.

68. The mission's recommendations by sector are outlined in the table contained in the annex.

Notes

[1] The fourth island of the archipelago, Mayotte, remains under French administration.

Annex I

Follow-up to the multidisciplinary mission

1. The efforts of the Government and of Comorian civil society will be extremely crucial in implementating the mission's proposals in practice, and the United Nations can count on these efforts.

2. Coordination of the various activities is essential in order to achieve tangible results and thus prevent efforts from becoming unfocused. To that end, such coordination should take place under the auspices of the resident coordinator of the United Nations system in the Comoros.

3. Each of the agencies in the United Nations system carrying out activities within the framework of the emergency programme to revitalize the socio-economic activities of the Comoros shall have technical and operational responsibility for the aspects identified as being normally within its sphere of competence and its mandate.

4. Each of the activities recommended within the framework of the emergency programme will be the subject, where necessary, of a request and, possibly, preparations in accordance with the procedures of the potential donor.

5. A strong appeal is made to the international community, particularly the donor community, to provide the Islamic Federal Republic of the Comoros with the assistance it urgently needs, as described in the annex of this report.

Annex II

Table of recommendations, by sector

Project title	*Beneficiaries*	*Budget (US$)*	*Planning executing agency*
Governance			
1. Strengthening of capacities for good governance	Entire population	100 to 150 000	UNDP
Agriculture and fisheries			
2. Emergency assistance to provide seeds, agricultural implements and veterinary products on the three islands	7 000 families	381 000	FAO/local and international NGOs + regional agriculture offices
3. Programme to compensate the owners of animals infected with anthrax in the Comoros	To be determined	70 000	FAO
4. Rehabilitation of fishery conservation infrastructures on Anjouan	3 100 fishermen	90 000	FAO/regional office and fishermen's associations
5. Promotion of activities in support of young rural entrepreneurs on Anjouan	820 people drawn from among young fishermen, farmers and agriculture students	216 000	FAO
6. Strengthening of veterinary services to support the implementation of micro-initiatives by young people in agriculture, beekeeping and livestock farming	About 500 young people	402 000 (financing already assured)	FAO
Food			
7. Basic food ration for food-for-work projects (see FAO project on seeds and agricultural implements)	49 000 on Anjouan and 7 000 on Mohéli	4.7 million	WFP, FAO and NGOs
8. Food for nutrition therapy	To be determined on the basis of the results of the nutrition survey	50 000 (supplementing the UNICEF regular programme)	UNICEF and NGOs
9. Food and nutritional monitoring	In poorest areas of Anjouan	To be determined	FAO/World Bank
10. Strenthening of the primary health care, vaccination and health promotion programme	Extension of the programme to 75 per cent of the health centres	100 000 (in addition to existing financing)	UNICEF

Project title	*Beneficiaries*	*Budget (US$)*	*Planning executing agency*
11. Development of a social statistical information system, thus helping to evaluate the state of social services to the population	All three islands	50 000	UNICEF
Water and sanitation			
12. Maintenance and management of water supply infrastructure	Priority to regions on the three islands, with emphasis on Anjouan and Mohéli	180 000 (in addition to the existing budget for the next six months)	UNICEF and NGOS
13. Improvement of latrines, waste management and environmental protection	Priority to regions, with emphasis on Anjouan		UNICEF and NGOs
Education			
14. Basic school supplies for primary pupils	10 000 pupils	200 000	UNICEF